A New Year prayer and an iftar party with a purpose

By Ashfaque Naqvi

THE policewoman turned poet, Neelma Sarwar, has sent a greetings card for the season to her friends and acquaintances together with a poem she has written on the occasion of the New Year.

I would like to share it with my readers.

Referring to the previous year, she says:

Guzray baras mein kitnay sapnay tootay thay
Guzray baras mein kitnay apnay roothay thay
Guzray baras jo zakhm milay voh kari thay
Guzray baras mein kitnay lamhay bhari thay
Guzray baras mein savan rut bhi piasi thi
Guzray baras mein har soo ajab udasi thi

(How many dreams were shattered last year,

How many of our dear ones left us.

The wounds suffered during that year were deep indeed,

every moment that passed was so oppressive.

Even the monsoons that year remained thirsty, a strange

haze of sorrow prevailed all around).

And then she prays:

Naey baras mein ya-Rab phool khila deina
Khushion vaalay saaray rang saja deina
Savan rut mein barkha bhi barsa deina
Roothay dilon mein phir say mehr jaga deina
Aanay vaala saal mubarak ho jaey
Har lamha, har haal mubarak ho jaey

(O Lord, make the flowers bloom in the New Year,

paint the environment with mirth.

Make the clouds burst during the rainy season

and provide affection once again to the hearts

which have become awry.

May the new year, and every moment of it, be auspicious).

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I KNEW Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed as a poet but was unaware of her other qualities. Australian by birth and married to a Pakistani sugar technologist, she has been here for 40 years, living in and around Lahore. Therefore, she feels that she qualifies to be a Lahori.

When I met her the other day, she was rather unhappy that people thought that unlike the poets of Delhi those of Lahore had not written any poem about their city. She was referring to my column of December 12. She showed me her poem, *Lahore*, written quite some years ago. It is a longish one spread over a dozen stanzas. I

reproduce some lines:

Lahore is large like the skirts
of my legendary mother
swishing about me as I walk The Mall
into wonder and question and
East is West
in the Shalimar Gardens and
Badshahi Mosque.
The Mall is a meeting place of men
—
a remarkable relic, modern as Zen
—
a place where sometimes anything goes
when nothing is taken as basis.
Lahore is beginning —
beginning time in you and me —
...

Jocelyn has studied in Germany and is inclined towards philosophy, rather metaphysics. She says in one of her poems:

Turn out the light
I need to love now —
need to love what I don't know —
need to love my dream of wholeness
till I'm white, till I'm snow

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MUNIR Saifi is not so well known as a poet and the only reason I can think of is that he is publicity shy. A banker by profession, he has been in the field of poetry for years on end but has only now come up with his first collection, *Loa* (Flame). Its foreword was written far back in 1994 by the late Sehba Akhtar but it is only at the insistence of his literary friends like Husain Majrooh, Shahid Shedaie and Sajid Ali Sajid that he decided modestly to have the book published in November 1998.

Munir Saifee is essentially a poet of ghazal, the evergreen, all-embracing genre of Urdu poetry. It can absorb and interpret a whole range of human experience and cover a variety of topics.

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IT is the month of Ramazan and iftar parties are held every day. Among the writers, Azhar Javed, editor of the literary monthly *Takhleeq* was probably the first to host one. Those invited by him at a local hotel had a predominance, as usual, of ladies. I saw Dr Attiya Syed, Seema Peroz, down to the youthful Anila Khan. Among the males, Qateel Shifai was listed as the main attraction but he came very late with the result that Prof Khwaja Zakria and Dr Anwar Saeed adorned the main table.

After the food had been laid out, and consumed, and the invitees had said their prayers, Dr Khwaja Zakria started eulogising A.G. Josh and came up with the remark that those who do not consider him a poet were *kafirs* (heretics). It was only then that I realized that the function had been arranged to shower praises on A.G. Josh on the publication of his fourth collection of poetry and the iftar party was just an excuse.